

The Athenian Mercury.

VV *Hence as we have received, amongst others, several Atheistical Questions, tending to the destruction of at least all Revealed Religion, tho' we have in the Preface to our first Volume, excused our selves from answering any such; yet on further consideration, knowing it is the nature of some persons to insult even when scorned, and think their Objections unanswerable because others think 'em not worth an Answer; we have resolved, in order to obviate the growing mischief of such poisonous Principles and Doctrines, to chuse out some of the strongest Objections we have received on those Heads, to which, if we have returned, as we hope we have, Satisfactory Answers, we shall have done no ill piece of Service to the publick, since, if we can ruin the very Foundations of Atheism, all the little Superstructures must of necessity fall to the Ground.*

Among other Questions of this nature, we have sometime since received these following.

Quest. 1. **V**V *Hether the Irish Massacre, and the Massacre of Paris, together with the growth and progress of Mahometanism, be not greater Arguments that the Machine of the World follows the dead Chain of Causes, than any can be produced, that can rationally convince us of God's Providence, or his care of Christianity?*

Ans. We must not, for every little difficulty in Providence, immediately un hinge the Universe, and deny any such thing as a Supreme Being, ordering Humane Affairs, both because we can at least, Morally demonstrate, that there is such a Being, and that he made the World, and consequently, all perfection being included in his Essence, must and does dispose of, and govern it according to fixed and equitable Rules; any Objection against his Providence, being therefore only like a *Protestatio contra factum*, a Protest or pretended Reason against indubitable and necessary matter of Fact: And also, because we cannot only often times account for these difficulties by the fixed rules of Providence and Justice, but also use those very things as Arguments for their Existence, since many of 'em were so clearly foretold by the Spirit of God so many hundred years before they happened. Besides, they may be both natural Consequents and just Punishments of Sin: For example, the Apostacy of the Eastern Churches to Mahometanism, and Western to Popery, were both the effects of that Vice, Laziness, Debauchery, Irrigation, Discord, and Ignorance which had ever-run the World, and also, just punishments for 'em, and both clearly foretold before they came to pass; those men being justly given over to strong delusions, to believe a lie, who first held the Truth in unrighteousness: And one would think Rewards and Punishments were rather an Argument for Providence than any Objection against it; the very want, or unequal distribution whereof is often urged against its Existence, tho' this too with the highest absurdity, by those men who deny any such thing as Vice or Virtue. What has been said on this Head may easily be apply'd to the Parisian and Irish Massacres, since it reaches to much larger Instances; but besides, if we consider the horrid ends which those wretches had, who were principally engaged in those black Villanies, we shall find visible marks of God's Providence and Justice in punishing as well as permitting them. Add to this one Consideration more, and a good man may prove this against all Earth and Hell, and that is, A future World, without which we are perswaded, in some Instances, it's next to impossible to defend a Providence, which we are sure is, and is both wise and just: 'Twould be in vain to own a God, which yet we are as certain of, as that we our selves exist; and 'tis true enough, that the Virtuous and Religious would often be, as the Apostle expresses it, of all men most miserable.

Quest. 2. *Whether the Story of Esdras's retrieving the Scriptures which were utterly lost, and the passages of Samson's Acts and David's Worthies, the Prophets lying so many days on their sides, and many other things insisted on by Father Simon, besides the whole drift of the Revelation of the Old Testament, that God should delight in Blood and Sacrifices, be not sufficient to weaken its Authority?*

Ans. Not at all, for these Reasons; As for the Story

of Esdras's retrieving the Sacred Books, when utterly lost, we'll grant it to be as much an old Wives Fable, as any in the Apocrypha whence 'tis taken; and, how fairly and ingenuously, let any judge, commonly made use of by those who would overthrow the credit of the Bible. But of this see more in the Question of the Pentateuch. For the passages of Samson's Acts, we'll give the Objector fair play and take the very strangest of 'em (for Lysimachus and many others have killed Lions) which we suppose they'll readily grant to be that of his killing a thousand men with the Jaw-bone of an Ass. But if One man, why not as well a thousand as to the force of the Weapon? and we are apt to believe those who see that Weapon and fairly consider it, would hardly be willing to try the strength of their Skulls against it, tho' not in the Hands of a Samson, whose extraordinary strength, as we are expressly told in the Scriptures, was a miraculous gift; nor is any thing too hard for God; which also reaches David's Worthies, tho' even the strangest of their Performances, that of combating whole Armies, we have seen almost paralleld in Humane History. We have read of a brave Roman, who stop't a whole Army till the Bridge was broke under him. Nay, even of a brave Irishman, who with his Half-pike only, has for some time maintained his ground against thousands of Victorious English (see Cox's Hist. of Ireland, part 2.) why then may not David's Worthies do as much, especially before the Invention of Guns, and probably in a Pass or Desile where they could only be attackt in Front, and that not by many more than themselves. But we'll quit this Head, lest the Gentlemen we are disputing with, who are generally very nimble in these cases, should change sides, and complain, that instead of too great a Miracle, 'twas now no Miracle at all. For the Prophets lying so many days upon their sides, might only be done in Vision. We are sure there's no absurdity in this, which being granted, their absurdity vanishes. For Father Simon, and that numerous heap of Objections, which he has raked together in his Answer to the Bible, we meddle not with him at present, none of 'em being produc'd, (tho' ten to one he may shortly fall in our way) only add this, That 'tis no wonder a Popish Priest should be against the Bible when the Bible's against him. For God's delighting in Blood and Sacrifice, it can't be said, that as such he ever did, any more than we delight in the Blood of Beasts which we kill for our use and nourishment; nay, he affirms in the Psalms he did not delight in Sacrifices and burnt Offerings; that is, as has been said, for their own sakes, but only as they served for the use of man, being enjoynd as lively Types or Figures of the inestimable Sacrifice of his own Son for the Sins of the World, at whose death all those legal observances were for ever abolished. In the mean time, what Barbarity, what Cruelty in the Blood of a Sheep or Ox, on which too 'tis to be remarked, that the Priests lived, when we daily kill so many thousand of 'em for our own use, nay, eat the blood too, which they did not! what so horrid cruelty in all this, unless we are to deal with some very merciful Pythagorean, or one of the more modern Priests of the Indians, who think it as great a piece of Barbarity, nay, sacrilege it self, to murder one of their holy Cows, as this Gentleman reckons it cruelty to enjoin the Sacrifices of the Old Testament, then in use among the Jews.

Quest. 3. *Whether 'tis not probable, that Christianity was invented at the destruction of Jerusalem? Whether the rising of the Dead, the darkening of the Sun, and the Ascension of our Saviour before 500 together, had not been worthy of Josephus and other Historians, had the Facts been true? And whether the Prophecies of, Out of Egypt will I call my Son; and that Christ should be born of a Virgin, be not too wrested, and the Inconsistency of the death of Judas in Scripture, too great a Contradiction for the Inspiration of the Holy Ghost?*

Ans. 'Tis a sign the Querist forgets his Chronology as well as Divinity, when he talks of Christianity's being forg'd at the Destruction of Jerusalem, which before that time, was planted in the most remote Nations on the Earth. This Destruction of that noble City, for the same crime he who makes the Querist guilty of, not believing our Saviour, happened some forty years after his death—but the Gospel was planted through-

throughout the world, as ancient Historians assure us, which in thirty years after his Crucifixion, ten years before that Desolation, according to our Saviour's own prophecy, (by the best Commentators thus apply'd) That the Gospel must first be preach'd to all Nations— and that for this very end, that they might see the terrible Destruction which befel the Jews, God's own People, for slighting and refusing it, and the truth of Christ's Doctrine by the completion of his Prophecies, Jerusalem was destroy'd by the younger Vespasian; and don't all the world know, that hundreds of thousands of holy Men dy'd for the Faith of Christ under those Monsters of Cruelty— Nero and Caligula, long before either he or his Father came to the Crown— and we hope they won't say, as great Fools as they make the Martyrs, that they dy'd for Christianity so many years before 'twas invented. As to the Miracles of Christ, the Objector goes beyond either the Pharisees, or Celsus, or Julian, or the Devil himself in what he advances against 'em: The Pharisees attributed 'em indeed to the Devil, but they never deny'd they were really performed, no more did Celsus, or Porphyry, or Julian, tho' the most bitter and subtle Enemies the Christian Faith ever had— except that grand Enemy the Devil, who was so sensible of the truth of 'em, and the injury and wounds that his Kingdom, and especially Paganism receiv'd thereby, that he rais'd up an Apollonius Tyaneus, and gave him all the Power of Hell, on purpose to Ape our Saviour's Miracles with his own lying wonders, and if possible, establish a little longer his own tottering Interest in the world. As for the mentioning the greater Miracles— the darkening of the Sun, our Saviour's Ascension before 500 at once, &c. For the First, 'tis very probable, even Heathen writers do mention it, (as we may shew when we see this first answer'd) for the Second, we are not sure his Ascension was before so many, that appearance of his to the 500 Brethren at one time being generally thought to have been in Galilee— But the matter is not much whether; and we say this concerning it— If recorded at all, it must have been by Christians, Jews, or Heathens. The Heathens (which will reach the other Miracles also) were either too far distant, or too much prejudiced: From one or both of which Causes, see what ridiculous accounts they gave of the Jews themselves and their manner of Worship, and this even the very best of their Historians: And had not something of this been in the matter, we could not easily imagin how such famous Princes as David, Solomon, and others, which none doubt had once a real Being, should not be mentioned, as well as their Contemporaries are in Heathen Writers (unless perhaps in a few doubtful fragments) or how the Temple at Jerusalem mist a name among the wonders of the World.

This for the Heathens of that time, for the Jews; we can't wonder they did not mention that and other Miracles, since they did not believe 'em— for had they done so, they wou'd no longer have continued Jews— But those who saw 'em, or who had such Authentick Testimonies of 'em that they did believe 'em, turn'd Christians— Four of whom have committed the exact History thereof, and of our Saviour's Life, Death, and Miracles, to writing, to which add a fifth, if not one of the same, who has done as much in the Acts of the Apostles, all agreeing in the great Circumstances, and no where contradicting each other in the very least, as we already have and are still ready to prove. But besides these, (or including 'em) five hundred more were Witnesses thereof, as thousands of his other Miracles: For as the great Men, St. Paul says, This thing was not done in a Corner, who all to their lives end, nay, with their very lives, attested the truth thereof, in spite of Wild-Beasts and Men, Atheists, Scoffers, Flames, Lions, Jews, Heathens and Devils. For Josephus, is't not, considering what has been said, a greater wonder that he takes any notice of our Saviour at all, than that he takes so little? for what he does make mention of him we see plainly in his Works; nor are we willing to give up so noble a Testimony from one who was no Friend to the Christian Faith, till we see stronger Arguments to oblige us thereto than we have yet done: But supposing he and others should have writ both this and much more of our Saviour, is it any way harsh to suppose the Jews or Heathens shou'd get an Index expurgatorius, to darken the Truth and expunge all such passages as favoured of Heretical pravity, as their Successors have since done? After all, we may once more ask— why are not the Christians credible Witnesses? If we had no matter of fact confirm'd unto us, but by evidence of the same nature with what they gave, we must believe nothing we don't see with our own eyes; nay, not so much as what we do. Do the Jews themselves deny, or did they ever, that they put to death, tho' they won't own they murder'd our Saviour? was it Glory made the Christians suffer all they did in Confirmation of those Truths which we still believe? They were poor Fishermen, not capable of such a no-

tice: They were unlearned, they cou'd not invent 'em; fearful, and dared not publish 'em. Besides, they wrought Miracles to confirm 'em, which baffled all the Philosophy of Greece, conquered all the power of Rome, dur'd, and at length, by the most unlikely means, that of suffering and dying, subdu'd the world— The tendency of this Gospel is Divine, the directions thereof practicable, and perfect, and infinitely superiour to any other Rule of Life. It teaches the best Divinity, the most refin'd Morality, and makes all mankind, if practis'd, easy and happy.

The Prophecy of Egypt, and that of a Virgin may be apply'd to our Saviour, and that principally, as well as the Sacrifices referred to his Death— Nor are we to wonder if the Spirit of God who inspir'd the Scriptures, and assist'd in the writing of 'em, should discover a more deep and reconcile meaning in some places thereof than we our selves cou'd otherwise think of. This alone seems a tolerable account of those and other such passages, not to say as some do, that they are apply'd by way of Comparison, Similitude, or Accommodation.

For the Inconsistencies in the Death of Judas, let us first see what is advanced to reconcile those seeming Inconsistencies in Vol. I. Numb. 24. answered, and then we'll consider further thereof.

Quest. 4. Upon the whole, whether we may not believe all Revelation to be an Invention? And whether the Man who wrote a Book intitled, the three Grand Impostors— deserves not to be commended?

Ans. I have heard of one the same no-Religion with the Querist, who being present where a Spark pretended he wou'd demonstrate there was no God, told him, that if he'd make his words good he'd immediately give him 500 Guineas— so willing was he to get rid of that troublesome— something or other within him, which wou'd not let him disbelieve it, and so gladly have let the Reins loose to all his Pleasures— nor did he stick to acknowledge, that this was the reason of his offer. The Querist must not take it amiss if he's rankt with those here mentioned, for we are ready to prove, and confident we can do so, that he who denies Providence, and denies Revelation, does by an unavoidable Consequence, deny any such Being as God, as he who denies any such thing as a rational Animal wou'd deny, that there's such a Creature as Man— So that tho' the Deist be a prettier name, there's in effect no difference but in name, betwixt him and the Atheist— What little reason we have to question the veracity of Divine Revelation, we have, we hope, in the foregoing pages sufficiently evinc'd— But the Querist desires to know, whether the Author of the three Impostors, of the same Opinion with himself, ought not to be admir'd for his Courage and Judgment in that undertaking. We answer, with we hope as much Justice as Indignation, That if there ever was such a Monster, he well deserv'd to be curs'd and abhor'd by all who pretend to be Christians, or so much as Jews, to be burnt here, and damn'd in Hell hereafter— the last of which undoubtedly he was without Repentance— which God grant to all that tread in his steps before they come to that place of Torment.

Quest. 5. Whether the Martyrs were not a parcel of Fools and Enthusiasts, to lose all the happiness of this world, and suffer the loss of life it self by the most exquisit Torments for— they knew not what?

Ans. — We fools counted his life madness— wou'd very well become the Querist. We know well enough his name who did really give those holy men that Title, which is here fix'd upon 'em only in supposition; nor is there any great reason to wonder, that one who thought himself All-matter, and that when this Life was gone, all was gone, shou'd think it the highest piece of folly for any persons to lose All for one who cou'd never requite 'em, since even Almighty Power it self can't make what is not, happy. But those men believ'd they were a little higher than Brutes, as well as a little lower than the Angels— They knew they had Souls, and knew very well what 'twas they dy'd for, and who wou'd reward 'em. 'Twas for that word of God, which Mr. Hobs thought of just as much Authority as the Alcoran, and the Testimony of Jesus, whom, we believe our selves not uncharitable if we think from good grounds, he and his followers thought no more sent from God than Mahomet. This they believ'd, this they lov'd, and this they dy'd for; even those very truths which the prophane World now tramples upon, as it did then; and this with the highest reason, seeing they chang'd this dull drossie life for Eternal Glory; and for this shall their Names and Memories be ever Sacred and Venerable among Christians, while those who abuse and ridicule those faithful Servants of Jesus, while their names shall stink with all virtuous men, and be equally abhor'd with those of a Celsus, a Porphyry, or a Julian— Thus much for the Atheistical Questions.